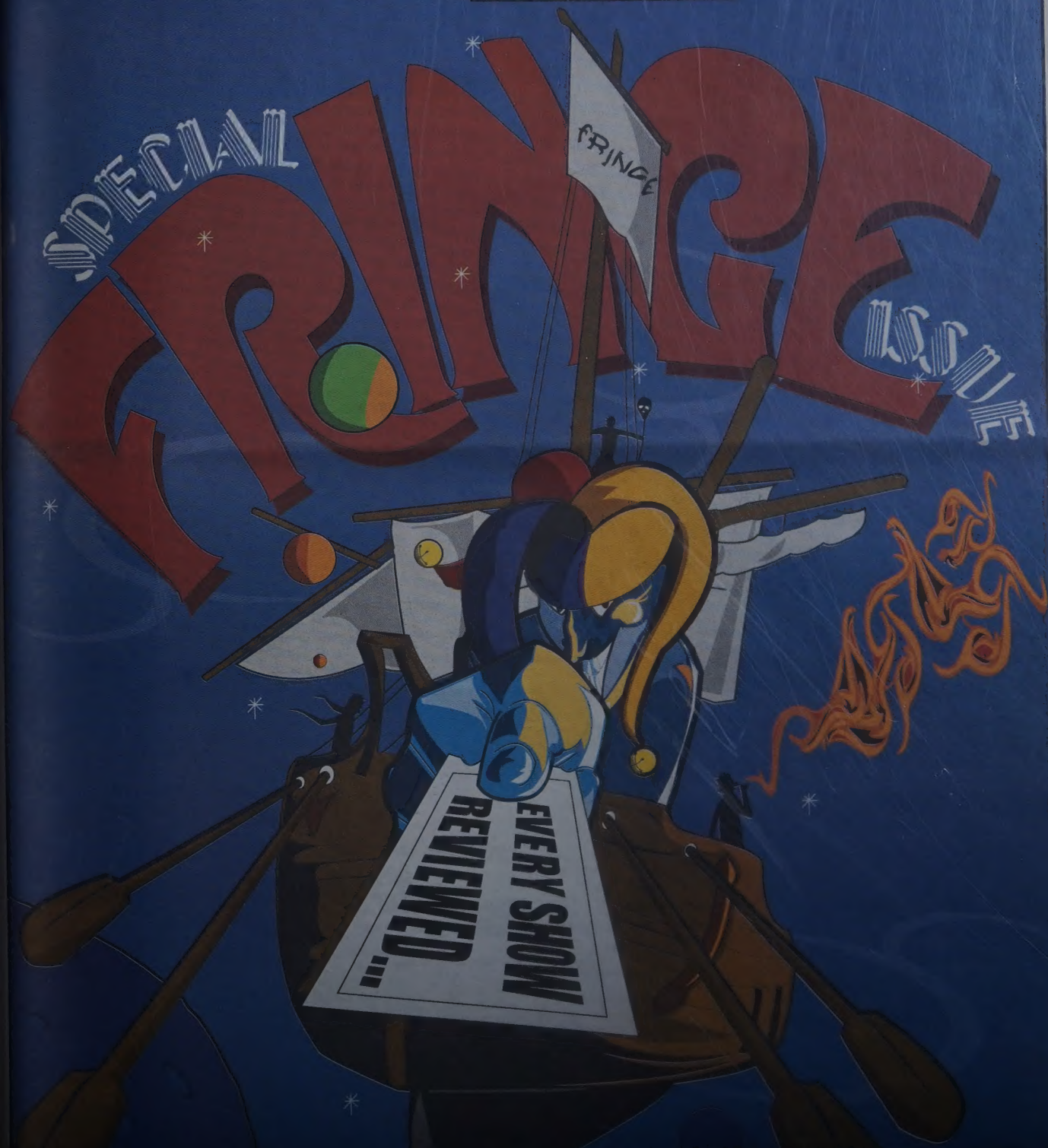


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# SEE

magazine

FREE  
EDMONTON'S  
WEEKLY



EVERY SHOW  
REVIEWED...

ENJOYING THE FRINGE? WHY NOT TAKE IN A SHOW WHILE YOU'RE HERE?



# Theatrical adventure awaits

**A** Fringe Odyssey has set sail for uncharted waters, but your journey into exotic Old Strathcona needn't be rudderless. SEE's well-seasoned team of reviewers has mapped out the most direct routes to theatrical delight.

Some otherwise well-intentioned employers don't give their staff a week off to feed their theatre habit. Some folks have to Fringe judiciously, meaning there's no time to peruse our alphabetical listings which begin here. Head to the back of the magazine for a listing of all shows by rating, ensuring that you'll be able to enjoy the best of the best and avoid the not-entirely as good.

## AUNT AGATHA'S STORYTIME

★★★

Kids under eight will find this show as entertaining as Barney the Dinosaur. So will adults. Luckily the show is advertised as being for the toddler set. Simple retellings of old fairy tales like *Little Red Hen*, with a few songs like *Little Bunny Foo Foo* were well received by the kids in the audience that were at that stage of development. At times Aunt Agatha's kinetic energy seemed unfocused and a touch nervous, but that didn't seem to bother the children, and, really, they are who this is for.

-Kurt Spenrath

## BACCHAE, THE

★★★

This is a stingy three stars for this piece of "rave theatre." The design of this piece is wonderfully innovative, and the concept of using the *Bacchae* as an allegory for tensions between rave culture and local authorities is inspired. Unfortunately, many of the actors have trouble filling the warehouse space vocally, and much of the text is lost. I also found the amazingly agile Paul Blain's choice of highlighting the angry, vengeful aspect of Dionysus to be somewhat out of tune with a god of joy and celebration. Kudos, however, to this young company for boldly experimenting with new forms.

-Kurt Spenrath

## BAIT, THE SWITCH AND THE MADMAN'S SCRATCH, THE

★★

The heist comedy is a genre unto itself, but there is danger in retreading familiar ground. *The Bait, The Switch...* can be described as Jay and Silent Bob meet *Snatch*, via B-movie production values. This play probably would work better as a film, since it already uses conventions, such as fade-ins, that don't quite work on stage. As

a result, this play doesn't seem to quite belong and takes no advantage of the fact that it is in a theatre. It's almost salvaged at the end by a judicious use of Bon Jovi — perhaps the best punch line in the script.

-Mari Sasano

## BAREFOOT

★★★1/2

Sexual abuse is "yesterday's news." It's a story we're sick of hearing. It's a story she's sick of telling. There's something about the way actor Pam Bustin tells it that makes you listen. Don't be misled. You won't be rolling in the aisles. This "play" would be more aptly categorized as a presentation on sexual abuse — the kind of presentation that you were happy to see in high school only because it meant shortened classes. Filled with moments of brutal honesty and touching humour, this is certainly a piece that will generate discussion. You don't want to see *Barefoot*. But you should.

-Shannon Blanchet

## BE A MAN

★★★★

In this entertaining and energetic tribute to testosterone, four men reveal how males relate to their world, through a mix of singing, dancing, jokes, and stories. The touching a cappella rendition of a traditional sailor's ditty — sung while the players kick around a soccer ball — sets the mood nicely for the rest of the lively, physical hour. The actors move with confidence, keeping the audience wrapped up in their stories while they jump quickly between skits. It takes a skilled cast to glide through the few technical difficulties (losing props mid-scene) with grace and humour.

-Jacqueline Janelle



**BOLD EXPERIMENT** *The Bacchae* ambitiously blends current issues, Greek myth, rave culture — with some success, says our reviewer.

## BEGINNINGS IN FREE VERSE

★★

It pains me to have to come down hard on this show, but I have no choice. While the three young actors in *Beginnings in Free Verse* are endlessly talented and do a bang-up job with their play's singing, dancing and acting, the text they've written is extraordinarily banal, horrid in bits. It's hard enough for most people to take an hour of modern movement/experimental performance, never mind when the text is a weakly penned string of poetic clichés. Way too much high school angst to stomach on a sunny summer afternoon, especially when there's so much good verse out there.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## BETRAYAL

★★★★1/2

There's nothing like a Pint — oh, I mean Pinter — at midnight. Hear the sarcasm? Well, don't listen. English Suitcase Theatre's *Betrayal* is a well-crafted production that will keep you awake at any hour (in spite of all those pauses). Featuring textbook performances by seasoned actors Kevin Williamson, Linda Quibell and Ross McMillan, it will not only engage novice audiences, but enlighten seasoned viewers as well. No visually stunning design work here — but with a brilliantly polished show such as this, who cares?

-Shannon Blanchet

## BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

★★★

At the centre of any Rom-Com there need to be two people the audience wants to see together. When the female half of the equation is distinctly unlikeable, then something about the story just doesn't click. A weak foundation scuttles an otherwise admirable structure. Chris Fassbender's comic timing is some of the best you'll see at the festival this year, and the supporting roles are well cast. While I laughed, however, I

couldn't get past the fact that I really did not want to see these two people together when the curtain fell.

-Adam Houston

## BIG THOUGHT OF MR. FITZSIMMONS, THE

★★★★

This two-hander, a sort of the *atrical Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, tells the life story of an ordinary guy and the two voices inside which battle for control of his mind and life. Dave Backus and Graham Vogt play right-and-left-brained aspects of Mr. Fitzsimmons; in childhood, one wants to solve puzzles and follow the rules, and the other imagines other worlds and colours outside the lines. Great, evocative language delivered at a hectic pace make this a rousing, active meditation on the potential selves that dwell within us all.

-Scott Sharplin

## BLACK AND WHITE PICTURES

★★★★

It is difficult to watch this play. It is impossible to watch it passively. A young teacher, Ms. Lamb, tells of the year she spent teaching on a northern Saskatchewan reserve. This is not a Hollywood story where a teacher takes a group of rough, underprivileged youths and shows them how to triumph. This is the story of failure, the failure of either culture to breach the gap of understanding. The audience shifts between sympathizing with Ms. Lamb (Leanne Jijian-Hume) and abhorring her behaviour. The play leaves the problems it raises unresolved: we are left wondering if we, given the same circumstances, would behave any differently.

-Jacqueline Janelle

## BLACKPOOL AND PARRISH

★★★1/2

Good acting and good casting keep the play from starting what

may possibly be its slow decline into datedness. Jeff Page, with his resonant and intense performance, really keeps the show alive. The evident relish with which he incarnates Evil is always funny and very convincing. Eden Philip is an excellent match — cool and confident — and the chemistry A very entertaining show for the right audience, with many snappy one-liners.

-Irina Florina

## BOB EDWARDS: THE EYE OPENER

★★★

A highly entertaining script introduces us to Canada's version of Oscar Wilde. The wit and quips are plentiful in this glorified stand-up act, culled from the best and most though provoking writings of the renegade journalist. As Bob, Tom McGovern, with his warm brogue, had some problems early on mastering the carefree ease with which Edwards reputedly spoke. It matters little, however, as the writing is the true star of this show. History buffs will be pleasantly regaled by this charming little chamber piece.

-Kurt Spenrath

## BONE SONGS

★★★★★

You tire of words, eventually. *Bone Songs* is a dance piece, musical and beautiful from Dance Theatre of Gdansk. The movement is modern, fluid in the first part, entitled *Whispers*, becoming quicker and more mechanical in the second half, *The Return*. Two figures reach for each other, move as a unit, separate, and meet again. The set is bare except for a pool of water and some plants, but the lighting shapes the space. It is definitely a show for dance aficionados, but if you're looking to try something different, here's an option. It's not afraid to approach the body as a source of story, not over-intellectualizing yet still able to convey mood and expression.

-Mari Sasano



**BETWEEN YOU AND ME** Rhonda NuGent (left) tries to fix up Chris Fassbender with Andrea House as the Every Blindate.



# FRINGE FESTIVAL

## BRIEF LIVES

\*\*\*  
...or not. The play can be described thus: an old man, in his last year, talking to himself for nine and a half hours. That being said, it's superbly acted by Jon Roggale. He has captured the essence of John Aubrey with all the belching, pissing in pots, narcolepsy and mental wandering of an old man. He drops the names of dukes and poets and physicians, telling anecdotes over and over, just like a man slowly losing his faculties. He makes coy 17th Century double entendres. Its verisimilitude is striking if not totally gripping for the entire production. It's a formidable feat to recite a one-and-a-half-hour long monologue, under make-up at that. But again: that verisimilitude.

-Mari Sasano

## BRILLIANT TRACES

\*\*\*\*  
Henry Harry is surprised when a hysterical woman in a wedding gown bursts into his cabin and faints on his floor. Rosannah is shocked to wake up in a taciturn stranger's bed and find that her shoes have been charred in a kitchen oven. Forced to account for decisions that neither consciously made, they fight through each other's awkwardness and defensive posturing to clear up the mysteries of their respective plots and forge a bond for the future.

-Skye Perry

## CAPACITY TO ENTER

\*\*\*\*  
Despite the name, Canyon Sam is not a crusty gold panner prone to shouting "Thar's gold in them thar hills!" Rather, she's a self-described Marxist-Leninist, separatist, feminist lesbian from San Francisco who is known for her writing, performance art and human rights work with Tibetan women. *Capacity to Enter* details her personal struggle to define her identity as she ages amidst the pull of sexual attraction to a variety of women and even men. Engaging stories about how she negotiates being categorized by her friends, family and lovers are compelling and hindered only by the sometimes frustratingly low volume at which she speaks.

-Dave Alexander

## CHICKEN MAN

\*\*\*  
One of the thrills of the Fringe is occasionally having the honour of seeing brand-new talent make their debut. In the case of *Chicken Man*, we get to see the solo performance/writing debut of Adam Joe — a talented, emerging thespian to watch for. In this one-person work, Joe's superior chops as an actor surmount the rough bits in his text as he energetically portrays the nerdy Finneas Straud. Finn is a tragedy in the making, a lonely high school kid slowly being engulfed by rage as he's mercilessly bullied by all and sundry. (Shades of Taber and Columbine).

-Gilbert Bouchard

## CITIZEN PLATE

\*\*\*\*  
It's hard not to feel good about a show where the entire audience is determined to have a good time. Jeff Haslam's *Citizen Plate*, the



**JUICY, GOSSIPY** Astute observations of modern love and its malcontents make Stark Naked Theatre's production of *Closer* extremely worthwhile.

popular local actor's first turn as a playwright, doesn't disappoint. These actors work so well together, using classic comic timing and performing with such energy that even the weariest Fringer will leave invigorated: the enthusiasm of this production is contagious. Don't expect to be intellectually stimulated, however, for this is an unapologetically playful show. Get your tickets fast, though. This one's sure to sell out.

-Shannon Blanchet

## CLOSER

\*\*\*\*  
*Closer* is a romantic drama that examines the complicated relationships between two couples. Daniel is a writer of obituaries who meets Alice as she gets hit by a car. Alice is an exuberant young woman who has been around the block a couple times in her young life, but who just wants to be loved. Anna is the photographer who uses Alice's image to launch herself to international fame, and her husband Larry is a dermatologist who is introduced to Anna via the Internet. Their lives become entangled and the result

is juicy gossip melodrama, which is to say that this play is enjoyable indeed. But more than that are the astute observations of modern love and its malcontents, and particularly the deft performances make this extremely worthwhile.

-Mari Sasano

## CLUTCH, THE

\*\*\*\*1/2  
Proving once again that other people's troubles are funny, Richard Lett allows us to hitch a ride through the Rockies on his road trip from hell, complete with broken clutch, rain, jailbait, crazed 'Nam vet, leftovers, and ATM problems. Well-paced and enjoyable, although perhaps a tad too long leading up to the finale.

-Skye Perry

## COCKTAILS AT PAM'S

\*\*\*\*1/2  
A broad Scottish accent is the lowest form of Fringe humor. Even barring its appearance, you still have a play that's not as Wodehouse-at-Peter Seller's *The Party* as it thinks it is, and much more like an overlong episode of

*Frasier* than it intends. There are loads of great lines, but they're often overshadowed by unfunny bursts of hysterics and a cast that can't decide whether they are portraying characters or caricatures. Nevertheless, a packed house thought it worthy of a standing ovation, so I yield to the will of the people and bump up the rating a notch higher than it deserves.

-Adam Houston

## CODE RED

\*  
When you have actors on a stage representing a penis and a vagina, nobody's expecting Sophocles. Even so, *Code Red* is almost totally lacking in structure, humour, and originality. It strikes me that there was a chance here to make fun of sexual politics, but the clunky script simply sets a horny penis against a sanctimonious vagina and expects the laughs to make themselves. The one star is for the moments of physical comedy, which are truly inspired, and provided the only real yuks in the show.

-Scott Sharplin

## COMPLEAT WKS OF WILLM SHKSPR (ABRIDGED), THE

\*\*\*  
Ever tried to see how many of those mini-doughnuts you could scarf in a minute? Well, Three Fools Comedy does the same thing with Shakespeare, cramming all 37 of the Bard's works into a frenzied hour and a half, then sugaring the whole thing with ham-handed slapstick. Imagine Shakespeare on 'ludes, and you've got the idea. The trio's translations are overdone: you feel like you're gagging on too much doughnut. That said, look for a snazzy rap version of *Othello*, a football game among all of the writer's doomed kings, and frenzy as the audience is coaxed into giving full cry (literally) to Ophelia's angst. Alas, the whole thing is too long for the sweltering confines of the Yardbird Suite.

-Ben Rudolfsen

## COMPLETE HISTORY OF CANADA

\*\*\*1/2  
It becomes clear early on that the jokes here have the stale familiarity of Abbot and Costello's who's-on-first routine — so you're not the least bit surprised when the performers incorporate it into their show. The production isn't without invention and wit, but tired Canadian in-jokes are wearisomely plentiful, and the scripted ad-libs feel heavily deliberate. Behaving manically doesn't, in itself, create a sense of free-wheeling comedy, and here mania sometimes obscures the recounting of Canadian history — though you're unlikely to glean much that's new in the way of either fact or insight.

-Kevin Wilson

## CONAN... AND THE LIBRARIANS

\*\*\*  
Librarians from around the city gamely clamber up on the loading dock behind the Strathcona branch and spin tales. They're mostly successful at engaging the audience, even when covered liberally with bugs. Sadly, young folk have taken to letting their parents handle most of the audience participation duties, but that may be because they're far too engrossed in the stories. It may also have something to do with the bellowing Englishman next door.

-Kevin Wilson

## CONDOM, THE CUCUMBER, AND THE GIRL FROM IPANEMA, THE

\*\*\*\*\*  
Some Fringe plays are criticized for using exploitive nudity to boost ticket sales, but some show more by showing more. *The Condom, the Cucumber and the Girl from Ipanema* gleefully uses the birthday suit to demonstrate how empowering and humbling our insecurities about sexuality can be. With a Jerry Seinfeld-like questioning of human behaviour, four young adults investigate the intricacies of underwear preference, the effects of media on body image, and merits of keeping a chilled cucumber in the fridge. Sharp dialogue, bold performances and hilarious birth-control props make for an entertaining message about how naked we are underneath all that skin.

-Dave Alexander





**DELIGHTED, WE'RE SURE** Four and a half stars for Bill Buffery and Gill Nathanson of *Earthly Delights*, which weaves together past and present.

## COOP DREAMS

★★★★  
The touch of the fairy tale in this play allows the audience to find a moral, if a distorted one. In the style of many a Catalyst Theatre production, the play depicts a surreal version of rural Alberta. The impressive set (given usual Fringe standards) combines plastic and wheat with blue and orange lighting and complements the eerie tone of the off-tune "happy birthday" that opens the play. Julianna Barclay's Lou helps the audience accept the unreal world of the play, while Jesse Gervais as Stupid and Siân Williams as Chicken not only convince us of their demented reality, but even make us pity their inevitable conflicts with "normal" society.

-Sheila Christie

## CRUMBS

★★★★  
Reviewing improv is the ultimate exercise in futility. These are three guys who have all the tools to deliver a good show. The night I saw it wasn't a strong one, but less for lack of talent than just bad luck. The Crumbs can likely be counted on to deliver a show that is at least satisfactory, and they will probably have some great performances. If you love improv, these quirky guys are worth taking a chance on.

-Kurt Spennath

## DAS BARBECÜ

★★★★  
Grant MacEwan College has lassoed a busy bunch of cowpokes for this musical take on Richard Wagner's epic opera *The Ring of the Nibelungs*. A dynamite cast of five, including Chris Wynters of Captain Tractor, corrals a bunch

of country tunes into two hours, setting their modernized version of the fairytale epic in the big ole state of Texas. As with all of Ryan's productions, sunny numbers sung to the rafters brand *Das Barbecü* as a surefire winner. Incest, adultery, betrayal — nothing gets in the way of a good production number, and there are a couple of doozies in this one. Get along, little dogies.

-Bev Rudolfsen

## DAVID BETTERMAN SHOW, THE

★★★  
When a show is free, start looking for the catch. In this case, it's the "opportunity to invite God back into your life." I have nothing against religious theatre, but I resent being ambushed, as I suspect, would you. That said, this energetic knock-off of the David Letterman show does give a few laughs, and the GP Crew Dance Team were enthusiastic, if a little sloppy. The "talk show" humour would probably work better with a larger, more reactive audience, but generally the atmosphere was one of a high school recital. At least it's safe to take the kids.

-Sheila Christie

## DEAD BOX, THE

★★★  
The actors manage to recreate a cattle ranch so badly managed that my ranching uncle would cringe, but Ron Chambers' script needs work. The point appears to be that we must "respect the meat we eat," but the play gets sidetracked in hazing rituals, psychic connections with cattle, and a "mystery" that never gets solved. Character arcs are unclear or deliberately obscured (as with the city girl

who has mysterious "school bills" to pay, and the manager who almost instantaneously decides to abandon the job he's once guarded like a rabid dog). This play has a lot of potential, but needs a few more drafts yet.

-Sheila Christie

## DEADRATS ON ARRIVAL

★★★★  
In case you missed their last "show," the DeadRats are a grizzled '80s pop band who now hide out in a garage and yell at each other between sets. Local musicians/theatrical personalities Paul Morgan Donald, Dave Clark, Peter Moller and Vladimir Sobolewski write and perform the music, which is kind of like They Might Be Giants in nicotine overdrive. The plotless show contains about twenty songs, punctuated by appearances from Doug (of Doug's Place) and drug breaks in the Ratvan. Sloppy, haphazard, and completely unashamed of it, it all comes together somehow.

-Scott Sharplin

## DEAR LIAR!

★★★★  
Jerome Kilty's 1959 work dramatizes of the longstanding friendship between George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a favourite actress of her day. Their friendship is revealed through the private letters the two sent each other over more than forty years. Coralie Cairns and John Sproule deliver lively performances and share an excellent rapport in this tight, funny, well-written play. Sproule's physical energy brings Shaw's letters to life, while Cairns makes palpable Mrs. Campbell's loneliness at the end of her life. It's lovely to hear Shaw's beautiful language in this upbeat show.

-Jacqueline Janelle

## DESDEMONA

★★★★  
With all the one-man shows and gimmicky entertainments out there this Fringe, it's kind of a shock to just go see a real play that's been done well. That's *Desdemona*, a flip on Shakespeare's *Othello* that gives us a peek into the lives of the women of the play, and it's totally engrossing. If you're not a big *Othello* hound, you'll probably miss some of the references (I know I did), but the relationship between aristocrat, servant and whore burns with as much tension and social relevance as the play it's derived from. And it doesn't hurt that this production features a trio of thunderingly good performances from its cast.

-Stephen Notley

## DIE-NASTY

★★★★1/2  
A Fringe institution, Edmonton's live improvised soap opera is back for another madcap celebration of off-the-cuff tomfoolery. Although the recent directorial change has left the troupe's performances somewhat uncertain, audiences will no doubt continue to delight in the midnight shenanigans, as special guests join favourite characters such as Mrs. Steely and the Dancing Man.

-Skye Perry

## DOMINO COURTS

★★★★  
Floyd looks forward to the return of his partner in crime, but Roy doesn't figure he fits in dusty

Oklahoma anymore. *Domino Courts* piques one's interest initially, but the production is hobbled by a cast that sometimes oversteps itself, by a play that can't quite decide what it wants to be, and by characters who transmogrify improbably. Indeed, one character disintegrates so precipitously that what began as an ambling character sketch ends as a farce with a gimpy leg.

-Kevin Wilson

## DON'T LOOK SO WORRIED

★★★★  
While it's more stand-up cabaret than a traditional work of theatre, I'd still urge all Fringe attendees to put Sheree Vickers' *Don't Look So Worried* high on their list of "must catch shows". Presenting a rambling stream-of-consciousness exploration of human weaknesses (fear and stress mainly), Vickers instantly engages her audience from the get-go, constructing a wonderfully paced show that virtually flies by your eyes. Liberally sprinkled with energetic song and dance, the production manages to seamlessly meld highly entertaining material with endlessly pithy observations on human life, from a wicked satire of Dolly Parton to a moving homage to WWI vets.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## DON'T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER, UNLESS IT'S ON A PREGNANCY TEST

★  
Thank God Zandra Bell has jettisoned her insufferable Shirley Best persona this time around, Fringe favourite be damned. Unfortunately, what she had for energy went with it. The replacement, a story just about her, Zandra, without Shirley to hide behind, is a snoozy hour of tepid witticisms as she talks about her childhood and the fact that her boyfriend isn't returning her calls. Maybe it's all some kind of "girl thing"; there was a fairly constant flutter of sympathetic female laughter throughout the crowd, even as the few men in attendance snored their lips off.

-Stephen Notley

## EARTHLY DELIGHTS

★★★★1/2  
Multistory Theatre Company has created a complex interweaving of classical Greek myth and the present day which plays itself out on a beach set in the present but also, somehow, at any time at all. The characters are at once real people, but simultaneously a host of figures from mythology. Much thought has gone into the text, which arrives at the very Greek conclusion that man and woman live in a moral universe. Or do they? From from start to finish the production is of a high caliber.

-Irina Florou

## EDMONTON QUEEN, THE

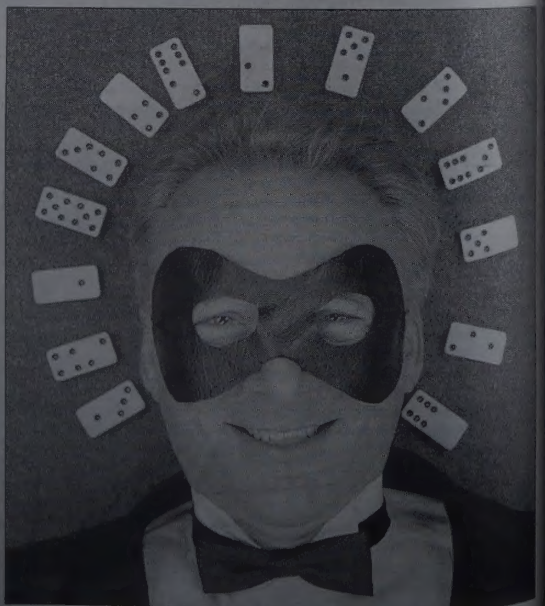
★★★★  
What would the Fringe be without a drag artiste? Perennial favourite Darrin Hagen remounts *The Edmonton Queen*, which had its conception first about six years ago. Since then, it has evolved into an award winning play and a book, winning over suburbanites and Flashbacks nostalgics alike. Darrin's comic and affectionately documents of the fabulousness of the '80s and early '90s drag scene with exuberant performance and some nice audio flourishes. No surprise that he's one of Edmonton's most charismatic institutions.

-Marty Sassano

## EIGHTIES LADIES

★★  
Marty Chan's sitcom satire *Eighties Ladies* spends too much time as an awkward sketch comedy and not enough as the biting satirical drama it keeps threatening to be. The '80s are summoned by the dropping of names like Dexy's Midnight Runners, which are supposed to be funny just by virtue of their sad existence. The satirical edge, sadly, is about as sharp as a butter knife, undermining a couple of excellent performances. Some of the dialogue — "that's loonier than a Canadian dollar" — should have suggested that the piece was in need of some tinkering before the debut.

-Adam Houston



**GANGSTER'S HALO** Roy (Christian St. Pierre) casts off his Oklahoma roots in *Domino Courts*.



# FRINGEFESTIVAL



**DON'T DO IT, ISABELLA** A deceitful father, a loathsome suitor and mirth are at the heart of Meta-Physical Theatre's production of *Fool's Gold*.

## EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW...

★★★★  
It's educational! It's funny! It's a musical! A cast of five young actors/singers presents an overview of Freudian theory in a punchy entertaining hour. Through reenactments, game shows, song, faux-lecture, and non sequitur, it's a fast paced romp through dream analysis, personality, sexual development and its consequences. Who wouldn't want to hear a song about the Oedipal complex? It's so ridiculous, it actually works in a weird kind of way. But consider the material these kids are working from — the play's a bit of a nutball himself. Now, if only they'd make a musical comedy about oucault...  
-Mari Sasano

## FAIR PLAY RULZ

★★★★  
Fair Play Rulz is blessed with an enthusiastic cast, but rather weighed down by its own good intentions. Designed to help kids and adults rethink the fairness of the rules that govern our behavior, this piece challenges the audience to intercede in a series of playground scenes with an eye to making the characters' interactions more positive. While this format is undoubtedly educationally sound, I can't say that it was terribly entertaining.  
-Skye Perry

## FANNY HILL

★★★★  
Eyewitness Theatre of Manchester presents an outstanding adaptation of Cleland's novel, the story of a country girl who becomes a famous whore. We see the reality of being a woman of modest means and the faking and deception which men need to fulfill their idea of themselves. The pleasure of the English language, with its multiplicity of tone and vocabulary, is the pay off here. Charlie Brennan and Peter McGarry make this show an all around joy of the spoken word. Bravo!  
-Irina Florian

## FINAL BROADCAST, THE

★★★  
I've been told young playwrights often feel compelled to write a dark, apocalyptic sci-fi play for some reason. *The Final Broadcast* is

Matt Stanton's, and it's one of the most original spins on the genre I've seen. Jason is broadcasting a pirate radio program to a world decimated by plague; he may be the last man alive for all he knows, apart from his enigmatic co-host, Mr. Staples. As they tip-toe around the truth about their situation, we start to wonder about the exact nature of their relationship. Clever and very, very morbid.  
-Scott Sharplin

## FIREBIRD, THE

★★★★  
Multi Story Theatre Company gets everything right in this family production. Similar in subject to *The Princess Bride*, this traditional Russian Folk tale is presented in an innovative and engaging manner. With ample use of simple theatrical devices Gil Nathanson and Bill Buffery slide seamlessly in and out of the dozen characters that populate the play. Tight performances and an action-love story make this a treat for kids and parents.  
-Kurt Spenrath

## FITCH AND CABBAGE

★★★★1/2  
It is rather dangerous to get caught up in one's own myth, as can be attested by the titular heroes of *Screwed* and *Clued*'s high-energy offering. Charting the rise and fall of a pair of ambitious footpads, *Fitch and Cabbage* is foreboding and intense — and wickedly funny. The anachronistic commentary on modern Britain that is cut into the historical narrative provides much hilarity, although slapstick humour and wordplay become increasingly scarce as the grim inevitability of the thieves' fate closes in.  
-Skye Perry

## FLIGHT

★★★★1/2  
Ignore the rather blasé promo blurb in the guidebook and go see this one, not only because it's a darn good play, but also so you don't miss that rare one-person show that fires on all cylinders. Particularly when it centers on a performance as engaging as the one Beth Graham gives here. The script, while fresh and funny, could use a little tightening in a couple of places, but Graham's performance, which succeeds so well in mixing comedy and pathos is reason enough to see the play.  
-Adam Houston

## FOOL'S GOLD

★★★★  
Meta-Physical Theatre offers this delightfully frothy bit of summer fare for those looking to leave the theatre smiling. Isabella's greedy father plans to trick her into marrying the loathsome-but-rich Duke Viagra. Things look hopeless, but true love may triumph after all — in spite of the help of a bumbling servant. The performers are a delight to watch as they bring their ornate masks to life, with Jeff Schwager's spritely Arlecchino being an especial treat. This is a classic *comedia del arte* that the whole family will enjoy.  
-Skye Perry

## GHOST TRAINS

★★★★  
This play stinks — of grease, of diesel fuel, of a thousand miles of steel and memories. Robert Benz is Dougie McCrea, train man, giving a eulogy for his dad and for trains in the bargain, and by the time he's done, you'll weep for both. Benz is easy and confident on stage, an actor who knows how to tell a story and make it roll with a wink and a punchline at just the right spot. Sharing the stage with a man and a guitar, the effect is pure transcontinental magic. *Ghost Trains* is slick yet poignant, looking back but still as current as this morning's coffee and bacon. Solid Fringe.  
-Stephen Nottley

## GIRAFFE AND A HALF AND OTHER TALL TALES

★★★★  
During his 40-year career, poet Shel Silverstein made a big place for himself in the hearts of many, young and old alike. Now, only two years after his death, his sometimes touching and sometimes outlandishly funny children's works are being brought to life for the Fringe Festival in *Giraffe and a Half* and other Tall Tales. A cast of three rambunctious ragamuffins play every part in this musical mosaic of mischief and mirth by switching quickly between outrageous masks and understated costumes. The result is a few slow transitions but, by the end, there isn't much doubt that *Giraffe and a Half* is a play on its way — up, that is.  
-Erika Thorkelson

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## GOOD GIRLS GONE BAD X 3 ★★★1/2

This tri-partite two-hander begins with Don Nigro's *Binnorie*, an exploration of sisters' complicated emotional and sexual growth leading, ultimately, to failure. Also included are Trevor Schmidt's story of sisters and motherhood, *Baby*, and Vivienne Laxdal's tale of childhood friendship *Karla and Grif*. This show is intense, well-acted and fairly heavy, except for *Baby*, which manages to keep its lightness and yet approach a potentially deadly conclusion. Kattina Michelle and Clarice Eckford manage to pull this complicated performance off.

-Irina Florian

## GORDON'S BIG BALD HEAD ★★★1/2

Sweet, sweet improv theatre. First nighters (okay, afternoons) were treated to the convoluted tale of a young man, who, bearing The Mark, eventually discovers that he is fated to assassinate several well-known local theatre critics (thank heavens for the comparative anonymity of a weekly). What'll you see? Who knows! But from the fecund minds of Mark Meer, Jacob Banigan, Josh Dean and friends, it's likely to be pretty amusing.

-Skye Perry

## HAMMER OF WITCHES ★★★★

The infectious nature of suspicion is at the heart of this dark nightmare-in-yuppiedom drama about two couples engaged in what amounts to a four-way witch

hunt. There's a baby-killer on the loose, and Ed and Laurie suspect their friend Dan might be the culprit. A thick web of deception is spun, but it's hard to tell where it's headed, and there are several reversals which punch the stakes through the roof. Crackling dialogue and a hard-working cast make this one a winner, although I wouldn't recommend it if you plan on leaving the kids with a sister.

-Scott Sharplin

## HANDS ★★

This is an interesting and spooky show about con men. Hands, played by Nick Kirkwood, works his con in the park: we see him applying his craft to everyone around him. The cast is committed and they keep the show going, although they all need a bit more experience. Kathryn Hanington as Rowan is excellent — very secure and a good foil for Kirkwood, who needs to get his body involved in his performance. An interesting if dramatically flawed peek into another world.

-Irina Florian

## HANGLIDING OVER THE ABYSS ★★

This is a bizarre story and a half. The principle story, *Hangliding*, examines the absurd, how we seek to find meaning where none exists. The unnamed main character was engaging and funny, turning nonsense into humour. Many of the other performers, however, were stiff and

awkward. The costumes and production smacked of a high school drama class. The short piece *One Coconut*, appended to the end of *Hangliding*, which questions societal norms, is funnier than the rest of the play. The whole thing feels like a first draft rather than a completed work.

-Jacqueline Janelle

## HOLLOW GROUND ★★1/2

A prison visit by his lifelong friend gives a serial killer a chance to unload and gives us an opportunity to unravel his psyche. The killer retraces his experiences and attempts to justify the murder. Morgan Jones (the killer) is suitably aggressive: he keeps the play moving. M. Andrew Plait, as the friend, communicates confusion and sense of betrayal — he can't understand how his friend could have done what he did. A good show, but the whole team needs more experience. And where were the prison guards while all this yakking was going on?

-Irina Florian

## HOTBOX ★★

Down to the rave for this story of ill-starred love. The work of young local performers, *Hotbox* doesn't quite manage to convince that this is more than the story of a fairly uninteresting guy who can't make up his mind. Despite the sheen of current concerns, the problem here isn't Ecstasy — it's the dope at the centre of the story, for whom we can feel little sympathy. It's hard to imagine that a



**WORLDS APART** The psyche of a serial killer is examined when he is visited in prison by a childhood friend in *Hollow Ground*.

goddess or a temptress would bother to get out of bed to wrangle over his uncharismatic, philandering, deceitful carcass.

-Kevin Wilson

## HUMAN NATURE, A ★★★

A collaboration between mime artist Yayoi and dance troupe Rakudo from Japan, *A Human Nature* is a movement / dance piece about human nature versus modernity. The choreography is for the most part in a jazzy-modern style that is accessible while

fusing dance and movement forms such as jazz, modern, Kabuki, Butoh, martial arts, puppetry and mime. The piece is powerfully danced by three men and two women, accompanied by mime artist Yayoi, evoking various aspects of life. In contrast, the more literal parts of the programme (such as the dinosaur) are clumsy and unnuanced. The movement of bodies is in itself beautiful and don't require the intervention of the symbolic, necessarily, to clarify meaning.

-Mari Sasano



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# FRINGEFESTIVAL

## WANT TO FLY

Children's shows typically feature a fast-paced script, snappy songs and the energy of a hyena on speed. This show isn't typical. The audience loses faith in the performers as quickly as the script loses. You needn't be an expert to recognize half-hearted performances by actors who don't like the show and are uncomfortable with the musical score. The exception to this rule is Serena Clark as the wester, who gives this show a much of the energy and conviction it needs. This company should be focused on script rather than costumes that, unfortunately, steal the show.

-Shannon Blanchet

## IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT SONG

Some kids in a music class discover a songbook which takes them magically through time and the different periods of music — everything from Beethoven's Ode to Joy to the Village People's YMCA. There are some good dance numbers, but this is a production that could have benefited from more rehearsal. The young actors need to speak up; much of the singing requirements were beyond their vocal abilities.

-Irina Florian

## INTERVIEW, THE

\*\*\*  
A comedy about a job interview that becomes repeatedly side-tracked. Barb, played by Shannon Blanchet, is an irrepressible job-hopful who can't answer the interviewer's questions directly — the stories she tells about her mother's blue dress are particularly entertaining. Unfortunately this is a staged reading — crinkling of pages and the occasional consultation of the script prevents the audience from becoming fully immersed in the play. This is a shame because the story is well-written and funny, though at times a little contrived. Blanchet does an excellent job of making Barb engaging and likable despite her obnoxious personality.

-Jacqueline Janelle

## IT'S ME ONLY BETTER

\*\*\*\*\*  
Given the subtext, it's so over-the-top appropriate for Shannan Calcutt's one-woman show to be playing in the Strathcona Baptist Church BYOV. In *It's Me Only Better*, Calcutt's clown-self Izzy decides to give up her frantic search for a man and join a convent. Well, it's never that straightforward for someone "unique" like the volatile perma-wedding-dressing-wearing one. This is a woman whose man-meeting strategy is to go on cruises and toss herself overboard to attract rescue-minded hunks. A high energy, crowd-pleasing show that manages to be laugh-out-loud frantic and deftly emotional subtle all at once. A seminal Fringe must see.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## KIDS ON THE FRINGE

\*\*\*  
There are some things that little kids can take a lot of — Barney, Teletubbies, peanut butter and marshmallow sandwiches. *Kids on the Fringe* is one of those things. Featuring alternating magic acts — the first of which was loosely



**BEHIND THE CERMONY** Yuki Kawahisa explores the life of a Geisha in *The Kimono Loosened*.

based on a Harry Potter-style class in magic — and other children's performers, this hour of interactive games is a lot more fun for three-year-olds than the 30-year-olds. Drop the kids off if you want 50 minutes to shop by yourself; if you do go with them, you might want to bring a book.

-Erika Thorkelson

## KIMONO LOOSENEED, THE

\*\*\*  
Love it or hate it, *The Kimono Loosened* is undeniably intriguing. A unique set of props are used to great effect. Yuki Kawahisa has an intriguing stage presence, and the dark script, about the life of a Geisha girl, takes some interesting turns. Still, I found the narrative thread got away from me more than once, and it was occasionally difficult to tell what exactly was going on — Kawahisa's accent takes a few minutes to get accustomed to.

-Adam Houston

## LADIES OF THE LOO

\*\*\*1/2  
In North America there is a unique relationship between women and the bathroom, where they spend time conforming to certain beauty aesthetics, handle the cleaning duties and retreat to confide with each other. At least that's what *Ladies of the Loo* tells us. A series of skits surrounding that most sacred and mysterious of spaces are performed by characters ranging in age from their '30s to '50s. Good natured ruminations about aging, familial relations and the female form make for light fare that contains plenty of laughs appropriate for almost the entire family — especially those familiar with sharing a bathroom with your average messy guy.

-Dave Alexander

## LIFE AFTER GOD

\*\*\*  
*Life After God* is a one-man adaptation of the Douglas Coupland short story of the same name.

-Kurt Spenrath

David Eden paints a portrait of Scout, a man who has fallen from the relative paradise of growing up in plushy North Vancouver in the '70s to a life of affectless drudgery in the '90s. Psychiatric drugs keep the depression at bay, but Scout has also ceased to feel strongly about anything. Through retelling stories about his circle of friends from high school, he reveals the broken person he has become and his desire to believe in something after preceding generations have rejected God, love, and ethics, seemingly in favour of nothing. Eden's flair for storytelling, combined with Coupland's resonant post-everything fairytale, make for an hour's worth of excellent theatre.

-Mari Sasano

## LIG AND BITTLE

\*\*\*\*  
Too tall and too small, Lig and Bittle set out to find the land of Pur Phectt Phitt, where they won't be different any more. In a playfully written and delightfully executed piece, Elyne Quan and Jared Matsunaga-Turnbull send their lovable characters on an epic quest during which they discover that being different might not be so bad after all. Bring the kids.

-Skye Perry

## LOUIS SCHISM: MINDREADER

\*\*\*\*  
I have an admitted weakness for this style of "medicine show" entertainment. Schism takes the traditional vaudeville mentalist act and jazzes it up with an eclectic new-age score composed by Greg Hannas. The venue has no seats, with the entire audience sprawled on soft wall-to-wall matting, adding to the effect. Schism's dry wit and deliberately paced delivery are very well honed. The slow "mind reading" section of the performance is more than made up for by a truly amazing closing involving "telekinesis." Definitely something different.

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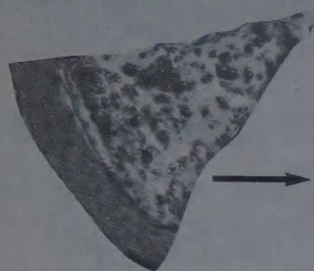
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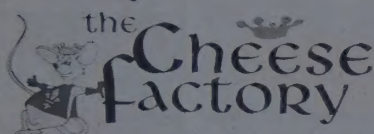
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## FRINGEFESTIVAL

### LOVER, THE

★★★★

This Pinter play lives up to the writer's reputation for delivering tightly crafted plays with unexpected twists. While Roman de Fruscan's performance is elusive, Elinor d'Angelis and Marcus Fernando demonstrate a strong range and immense physical control as an upper middle class couple with intriguing sex lives. An extended silent prologue and original score by Mark Taylor heighten the mystery of this couple's lives, and focus the audience's attention on what lies beneath. This British troupe's production shows the seductive and steamy underside of respectable British high society.

-Sheila Christie

### MAMAGORKA

★★

If you're looking for something completely off the beaten path this year, read on. *Mamagorka*, by the Mexican-Canadian group Maple Salsa Theatre, is a loud and visceral cringe-fantasy exploring the relationship between Mamagorka, a downtrodden single-winged fairy, and her retarded child Peyamo, whom she conceived through a forbidden tryst with a giant. As she irons the giant's enormous shirt, she tells her son repeatedly how her woes are all his fault. Norma Lewis and Ryan Beck are intense physical performers and would be worth watching if the play weren't so one-note. Warning: when it's Theatre of Cruelty and there's an iron on stage, don't expect a happy ending.

-Scott Sharplin

### MARIE CHRISTINE

★★★★/2

This work, a modern adaptation of *The Medea*, is challenging work in every possible way, with its large cast, modern operatic vocal and physical acting. It tells the story of Marie Christine, a girl of mixed race raised by her white father in New Orleans. The score was too demanding for the vocal development of the singers, but great commitment was shown by all performers especially Melissa Veszi as Marie Christine. The stage was too small for the combat scenes: it got a bit scary. If you like modern opera, this is for you. It's worthwhile and memorable.

-Irina Florian

### MEN COMMANDMENTS, THE

★★★

What happens when the boy-girl thing is turned on its fickle ear? Women, not men, afraid to commit? Brits Sarah Quick and Ruth Dennison go there in hilarity in this salty take on relationships. The pair throw Bridget Jones into reverse gear, dispensing funny, clever, profane and profound gems like so many glow-in-the-dark condoms. Couched in honest humour and Brit wit, *The Men Commandments* is a list of dos, don'ts and everything in between. The duo don't miss a beat as phone operators by day and disco queens by night, one looking for love, one caught up in it and not quite sure it's where she wants to be. Crisp and dead on, luv. Kadakadang!

-Bev Rudolfsen

### METROPOLIS NOIR

★★★★★

In the wake of globalization



**ACTOR, CONTROLLED** Chris Craddock employs new technology to take you on a lightning-paced journey in *Moving Along*.

protests and Canada Day riots, *Metropolis Noir* is a harsh look at a not-improbable future. As Quebec's generators power American air conditioners, Montreal is plunged into blackout, riot and martial law. Here, a jaded former anti-corporate terrorist spars with his sound bite-happy reporter sister over the root of the violence, while his friend desperately searches the city for her missing anarchist boyfriend. Fuelled by DJ Phatcat's driving soundscape, *Metropolis* largely avoids the danger of becoming preachy or bleak, and maintains the humanity of all its characters while examining politics, protest, media, capitalism and violence.

-Skye Perry

### MISTS OF TIME

★★★★

Who knew an Irish wake could be so darned uplifting? Brian Kiely, backed by the graceful sounds of a cellist and a harpist, plays a song, musing tenderly on his father's life even as he mourns his death. The show is a fine addition to the Fringe, reviving a simpler way of telling a story and losing nothing in the process. Weaving colourful Irish folklore with the unfolding tale of his father's life, Kiely and his crew tell an ordinary story quite prettily, catching at the heart. What could have been a Hallmark card cliché instead stands as a thoughtful interlude.

-Bev Rudolfsen

### MOLLY

★★★★★

Isn't comparing men and their particularities interesting? What does go through a woman's mind, especially if she doesn't censor herself? It's called being alive, and it's that simple feeling of existence that we see and sense in this production of Molly Bloom's soliloquy from final chapter of Joyce's

*Ulysses*. Joanne Haydock recreates the soul, the very essence of this human being. The production never lapses — she recreates Molly's memories with admirable skill. And it's so wonderful not to have to read Joyce to enjoy this: it's the virtue of theatre. A tour de force.

-Irina Florian

### MOOSETRAP, THE

★★

A healthy knowledge of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* is handy, though not essential, in appreciating this murder mystery spoof. Five actors labour to transform the tiny community hall stage into an isolated hunting lodge on a "dark and stormy night." Murderous innuendoes and scattershot movie references abound. The dialogue, accompanied at times by the synchronized swirling of brandy glasses, is humorous, but the mystery's resolution outweighs the set-up — and whether your thriller is serious or light, it's the set-up that people pay to see. Some strong performances, especially Linda Cornell as the beleaguered hostess.

-Scott Sharplin

### MOVING ALONG

★★★★★

This show is brilliant. Run to see it. Chris Craddock takes you on a lightning-paced journey that will make you laugh and cry, sometimes both at once. The "new technology" described in the Fringe program is an actor-controlled lighting system that responds instantaneously, allowing for pace and transition that previously were technologically impossible. As neat as that is, it pales when compared to the masterful script and virtuoso performance. See it! See it! See it!

-Kurt Spenneth



# FRINGEFESTIVAL

## NIGHT WITHOUT STARS

It's tough to keep a show's energy high enough to satisfy kids, especially on the stiflingly hot overcast Family Stage, but *Night Without Stars* do it with charm. The story of a kingdom plagued by the moods of a sleepless queen, the show features charismatic performances from all three of its leads. Add to that a whimsical plot that is both simple enough for small children to understand and smart enough to keep the parents and the audience from falling asleep, this kind of star gazing is a family affair.

-Erika Thorkelson

## NOTRE DAME OF PARIS — THE MUSICAL

*Notre Dame of Paris* is an ambitious piece — an epic pop musical mounted by a group of largely inexperienced performers. Although the cast is talented — Dike Igboemeka's richly emotive voice and Maria Kolasis' spirited dancing are highlights — a number of flaws prevent this production from being of professional quality. Many of the singers demonstrated a pronounced tendency to slide off pitch during impassioned vocal throws, and two of the leads wildly overused glottal closures and gasping at the end of lines in order to convey their characters' torment. In general, the actors also seemed unable to move beyond the physical limitations of the space to tell the story: they seemed more conscious of themselves as performers than of the characters they portrayed. Still, *Notre Dame* is a good effort, and we are sure to see some of these young singers at future Fringes.

-Skye Perry

## NUNSENSE

Y'gotta like any play that starts with 52 dead nuns. It seems bad, but it's a full-on musical, with 18 different songs over 2 hours (with an intermission) at the beer-serving Chianti stage. Sure, it's cheeseball Catholic humor, but the gags are all good-natured and the whole thing glows with charm as each of the nuns discovers the irrepressible showgirl within. Fun.

-Stephen Nottley

## OASIS

I thought plays like this were annoying and pretentious back in high school. That was when people were scribbling this sort of angst melodrama in the back of a Keytab during math class. The dialogue is awkward. The action is poorly paced, dragging out the beginning and rushing through the end. And myriad cutesy touches — naming the characters She, Her, and Him for example — draw so much attention to themselves that they hinder the piece instead of assisting it. The cast do get an E for effort, mostly for demonstrating dedication far beyond what their script deserves, but unless you're friends or family, steer clear.

-Adam Houston



**WAKE-UP CALL** Kids and parents alike will be entertained by *Night Without Stars*, an absolutely cranky but alert monarch.

## OLD CURIOSITY SHOP, THE

I'm still a bit skeptical about the idea of doing Dickens at an ostensibly alternative theatre festival, but if the material appeals, then this is excellence of execution. A uniformly fine cast provides an adaptation that is thorough and imaginatively staged. The twists and turns of the source material are kept intact despite the abbreviations needed to stay within the constraints of a two-hour play. Even more impressive is that it manages to make Dickens' world of misers, heirs, and paupers both accessible and quite funny, neither of which are the first terms that come to mind when I think of Mr. Dickens.

-Adam Houston

## OVERCOAT, THE

This adaptation of a Russian short story is an enthusiastic, if amateur, production. The performance of lead actor and co-director Kieran O'Callaghan stands out among the other, occasionally wooden performances, but generally the two directors (Marnie McDonald and O'Callaghan) have used their actors' talents well. However, the script is choppy and episodic, and the actors need to pick up the pace. In addition, the directors seem uncertain of the overall tone they want to achieve: there are bits of clowning, magic realism, and thriller suspense that slip into the naturalistic world of the play, but none of them last long enough to make a coherent impact.

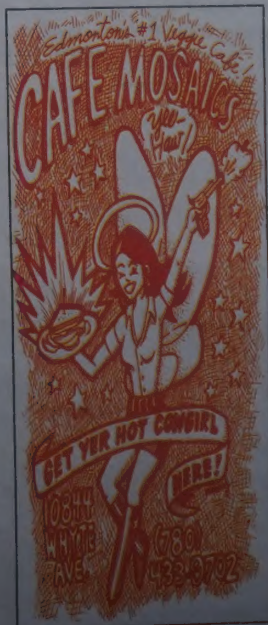
-Sheila Christie

## PASSION: A PLAY IN ONE ACT

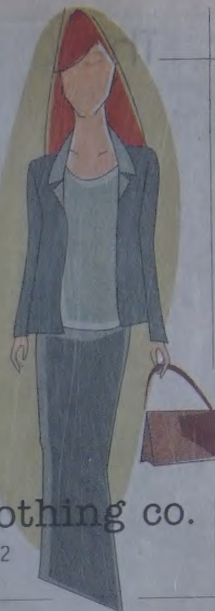
An interesting idea that goes on a little too long. *Passion* investi-

gates the evolving relationship between man and art. A happy love affair between two rich kids unravels over a statue, while the god Audrey, disguised as a servant, controls the mayhem. The point would have been better made had it been stated a little less. Amber Borostik, as Vera, the statue-come-to-life, shows excellent physical control, although her childish dialogue and tone of voice are irritating. Eric Nyland, as Audrey, is restrained yet charismatic. Someone should tell the cast that "rich people" don't really speak with faux-British accents.

-Jacqueline Janelle



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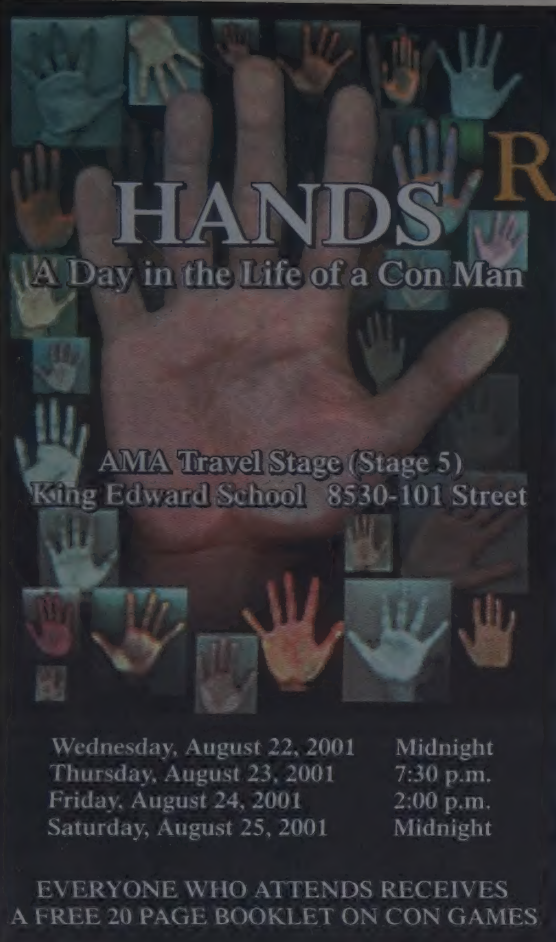


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## FRINGEFESTIVAL

### PIGS

(no stars)

Men are pigs — tell us something we don't know. This angry, immature work (written, produced and directed by Zhauna Alexander) takes place in Hell. That, apparently is where all men go — to become real pigs: Hell is a giant hog farm. Klaus (John Dolphin) is the farmer, a stereotyped, homophobic German on crutches who secretly longs to be sodomized — of course — by his livestock. Greta (Laura Black), his wife, prances about in a fetching PVC catsuit, stumbling her way through environmental awareness trivia. The punk rock musical interludes by *Story of the Eye* are fun, but a play so lacking in substance is hardly worth sitting through. Watching Alexander sell it, full-throat and full-throttle on 83 Avenue, is far more entertaining than the work itself.

—Jacqueline Janelle

### PLACE YOUR COMMERCIAL HERE — DRAG SHOW!

★★★★

You know these ladies — the ones with the huge smiles, sparkling evening dresses, and better legs than most of us could dream of having. They must be men! Local drag queens Twiggy, Bianca, and Kitten Caboodle put on a larger-than-life performance of all the Barbara Streisand, Joan Rivers, and where-do-they-put-it jokes you'd expect from a traditional drag show. And despite some forgotten lines and glaringly visible bra-strings, *Place Your Commercial Here — Drag Show!* has some side-splittingly funny acts. It's just too bad they're the same ones you can catch at the Roost any other time of the year for the price of cover.

—Erika Thorkelson

### POSSIBLE MAPS

★★★★

This play takes you on an adventurer's exploration of today's uncharted territories — ideas, truth, families, and maps themselves. It looks at the blind faith we have in our own perspectives, and the pain and panic we feel when we lose our way. Charlie Tomlinson avoids the self-indulgence that is often the pitfall of a one-man show. His clever, witty character allows us to see through carefully constructed barriers. Tomlinson also interacts with a complex slide presentation (designed by Gerry Porter) as though it were another character, one that sometimes forces the actor to dwell on topics that he'd rather not discuss.

—Sheila Christie

### PRES. MATWYCHUCK

★★★★

This is the kind of play that gets you grinning as soon as it starts, and you don't stop until it's done. Tall, bald Paul Matwychuck, playing himself, gets an onstage phone call telling him he's president. He hangs up, obviously pleased, and chats about it with his first lady Sharla, every so often getting a phone call updating him on how his presidency is doing. Matwychuck once again delivers some of the smartest fun at the Fringe, seamlessly blending historical facts with historical lies to advance his basic idea that a presidency is like a marriage is like a play. The smart lines drop in fast



**YOUNG, SHALLOW AND RESTLESS** *Pyropornomania* doesn't do twentysomething angst justice.

and quick, with some great gags that click two seconds after you think they should. It's freakin' hilarious.

—Stephen Notley

### PROGRESS AND ANTIPROGRESS ON PLATO'S TV

(no stars)

The synopsis in the program about *Progress and Antiprogess* seems so appealing and simple. Plato, magically revived in the earliest 21st century, painfully comes head-to-head with the full excess of post-modern culture. Too bad the play didn't live up to its potentially elegant premise. Less a production than a badly botched workshop, this has got to be one of the most bumbling productions I've seen in years. Not only does this show have nothing to say about Plato (understandable, I guess), it has nothing to say about contemporary society. Reminds you that Fringe does indeed rhyme with cringe.

—Gilbert Bouchard

### PURE HOOPAL

★★★★

It's exactly what you want to see as the culmination to a night of Fringing: a not particularly tactful and absolutely hilarious free-for-all. I won't say more, because as they themselves plead, "please don't try and describe it, as it will probably sound really bad." Not of the highest brow, perhaps, and it might not be a bad plan to stop off at the beer gardens on your way in, but it's a welcome venture by two masters of taking the too far joke too far too far.

—Adam Houston

### PYROPORNOMANIA

★★

The story of twentysomething love gone wrong is set against the backdrop of house music, drugs, and meaningless sex. The shallow existence of the four characters makes their self-analysis both boring and uninteresting. We never feel the passion or suffering that "the couple" is supposed to be enduring, so Ben's attempt to destroy their past by setting it alight seems pointless. Daniel Martin, as Ben, often looked awkward. The writers had as much difficulty coming up with a solid ending as they had coming up with a point: the final scene lacks both punch and a conclusion.

—Jacqueline Janelle

### QUIET ROOM

★

*Quiet Room* is one more artistic

work in a long line of books, plays and movies depicting life in a mental institution — it's just not a good one. This cliché-ridden (if not out-and-out offensive) one-woman work is set entirely in a quiet room of an unnamed institution, and chronicles the rantings of an obtuse actress/dancer-cum-mental-patient. Well, obtuse in that the text tells us next to nothing about our protagonist's background and doesn't seem to care. Not only is the text lacking, the rubber-wall-chewing performance by Hallie Wynn also left me cold. See this show and risk your own sanity!

—Gilbert Bouchard

### REAL MILLENNIUM WIRELESS BROADCAST

★

There's nothing automatically wrong with doing a radio show on stage, except that all the pictures you're supposed to be creating in your mind are replaced by just watching the actors reading from their scripts and providing the occasional sound effect. The players are amiable enough, but the material is the kind of bland, make-your-gramma laugh stuff that CBC programmers love. Do we really need a warmed-over who's-on-first routine? Or a lame-ass *Maltese Falcon* spoof? It was the interminable non-story about some guy's grad night woes that finally blew my patience out the back door. If you want sketch comedy, go see *Gordon's Big Bald Head* a couple of times. Skip this.

—Stephen Notley

### RETURN TO SENDER

★★★★

Resonating with the Robert Latimer case, Heidi Janz's carefully constructed script examines why a man would take his disabled daughter's life. Mary-Pat Schlosser and Laura Raboud do a stunning job of portraying teenagers, with all their trials, who also happen to have cerebral palsy, with all its pain and difficulty. Jan Taylor's direction ensures a smooth, unified production, aided by the supporting cast (Christopher Menu and Will Vass) and intelligently designed live music (guitarist Dwayne Osbaldeston). The play sometimes manipulates its audience emotionally, but it never does so unfairly. Instead, it leaves us with a better understanding of two perspectives from which we must make our own decisions.

—Sheila Christie



# FRINGE FESTIVAL

## DEAD PIG

★★★  
A memoir, part travelogue, part your trip across Canada as if you just as soon not see it. Nicola Gunn has seen Canada — in ditches and apple packing sheds and overcrowded guest houses and the passenger seats of many vehicles belonging to other people. You think sometimes that this is the whiny rant of someone who's made some rather foolish mistakes, but Gunn's gift for storytelling and her candour catch you as she unravels the story.

-Kevin Wilson

## ROOMMATES 2.0

★★★ 1/2  
Really, it's amazing that more people don't die violent deaths at the hands of their roommates. Between the close quarters, money issues, and sharing of toilet paper, the potential for conflict is positively Balkan. Fortunately, since all comedy is born of pain, the potential for laughs is also extremely high. Falling on hard times, an unemployed webgeek rents a room to an easy-going art model who turns her hostess' well-ordered life upside-down — and opens up unlimited business opportunities. If you don't come for the fine performances or good writing, come for the Three's Company tribute.

-Skye Perry

## RUNNING

★★★  
Director Laura Roald takes a romanticized look at a piece of Canadian history. *Running* is the story of Alex Decoteau, one of Canada's greatest long-distance runners and a hometown boy to boot. This interesting and sometimes moving story struck a chord with the audience. The unrequited love story between Decoteau (Chevor Duplessis) and Annie (Amelia Maciejewski), in particular, was poignant. A superlative scene and some laughable costumes don't completely undermine this well-acted and generally well-told story.

-Jacqueline Janelle



**DUCK DELUXE** Roommates 2.0's April Bannigan and assorted frends, nesting.

## SANCTUARY

★★★  
A one-man polemic on small-town violence, this play comes through the frame of an open mike night in a local bar. A young man recalls his youth in Whitby, Ontario (where the strippers strip to Ozzy Osbourne), and the testosterone-driven conflicts and calamities which eventually lead to his girlfriend's death. A thick layer of irony makes for a somewhat distanced confession. The script and the acting were both sincere, but the play lacked the detail and intensity to be truly involving.

And believable? I'm sorry, but nobody — nobody — would ever prefer *Godfather III* over *Godfather I*.

-Scott Sharplin

## SCREWBALLS

★★★  
Pair a sleazy bartender with a kooky British bird and you've got a love story worth telling. When knock-kneed, flat-chested Helen trips into a Greek bar while on vacation, Dimitri immediately goes on the prowl for her knock-out friend, while Helen herself completes the triangle, cooing about Dimitri's squishy belly. This little cautionary tale about missing the forest for the trees has the lounge lizard bantering in goofiness with the adorable, naïve girl who's dying to be noticed by him. Vern Griffiths as the egomaniacal Dimitri and Letitia Thornton as Helen serve up a cocktail brimming with adorable hijinx and clever dialogue that makes them both winning characters.

-Bev Rudolfsen

## SEASCAPE WITH SHARKS AND DANCER

★★★  
Prolific American playwright Don Nigro has penned about 190 works, so the guy has a pretty good handle on his trade, and if *Seascape with Sharks and Dancer* is any evidence, he also writes for actors. This means that the work is heavy on exposition, relying on the players to explore their characters, which they do quite well. The hour-and-a-half, single-location story is of a mysterious and almost unbearably antagonistic woman who is saved from drowning by a lonesome novelist. It is both remarkable in what it demands from its actors and tiring in what it demands from its audience.

-Dave Alexander



**IT'S ALL SHOW YOU SQUISHY** Letitia Thornton and Vern Griffiths serve up winning character in *Screwballs*.



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# FRINGE FESTIVAL

## SECOND SHEPHERDS' PLAY, THE

★★★★½

If seeing a religious play would freak you out, don't go — but if it doesn't, don't miss it. *The Second Shepherds' Play* is based on the medieval Wakefield Corpus Christi plays that portrayed the birth of Christ in contemporary settings. This time, the story is a sort of redneck renaissance: the players are simple prairie folk who speak in rhymes, and the plot is a straightforward, up-with-people tale about a sheep thief trying to bamboozle three farmers. The story is told with song, comedy, and formidable slapstick. The Christmas setting seems unnecessary and out of season, and I don't think there's a Bethlehem in

Alberta, but the play definitely accomplishes what it sets out to do.

-Jon Dunbar

## SEE ME NAKED

★★★★★

My initial reaction when told to review *See Me Naked* was one of fear. Terrified that I would have to sit through another Fringe play that substituted tits for talent and mistook stupidity for shock, words cannot describe how pleasantly surprised I was by this piece. Maria Glanz delivers a warm, sensitive meditation on our relationship to our bodies that is amusing and inspiring. She connects with the audience and gently encourages us to love her and ourselves. Percussionist



**PLEASE, DON'T BE AFRAID** Maria Glanz's *See Me Naked* delivers a sensitive meditation on our bodies.

Micheal McQuilken, who keeps reminding Glanz that she is there to get naked, should receive an award for "Outstanding Straight Man."

-Kurt Spenrath

## SEEDS

★★★★

Gordon Pengilly's award-winning script is a return to Canadian Gothic, a style almost forgotten in the whirlpool of expressionistic wankery and full-frontal nudity, although even this taciturn tale of dysfunctional farm life can't escape without a smidgin of homoerotic subtext. Isa and Pat are a rural couple that leave a lot of things unspoken between them — like how Pat, who describes himself as "ugly as a rusty manure shovel," ever landed a looker like Isa. The arrival of a young farmhand propels the not-quite-tragedy forward. Good performances, although Patrick Gilmore's naturalistic mumbling is hard to hear and out of place.

-Scott Sharplin

## SEX, DRUGS, ROCK AND ROLL

★★★★

Okay, I'll admit it: I'm no Eric Bogosian (*SubUrbia*, *Talk Radio*) fan, so it says a lot that I'm lavishing such high praise on this production of *Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll*. For starters, full points to Jeff Halaby for daring to perform this relentless one-person play. It takes guts to take on more than 10 wildly divergent characters (from the homeless to the Wall Street monied to wastoids to disaffected artists) delivering semi-thematic but unrelated monologues. Not only does he manage to pull off this back-breaking job, he does so on a nearly bare stage with seconds between scenes.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## SEX, LIES AND FAIRYTALES

★★★★

Being swept off your feet can land you on your ass, as every woman who's dreamed of a fairy-tale wedding has discovered after the last handful of confetti is thrown. Carmen Davison and her Curler Girl Productions take on the myths of Prince Charming that infect dating patterns forever after. Swathed in princess taffeta and glitter, the gals kick a few holes in the white picket fence of relationship perfection and ask what happens beyond happily ever after. The hilarious, if predictable route they take is strewn with foot fetishes, ugly bridesmaid dresses and the conclusion that maybe Snow White was better off with seven little men instead of just one. Fringe fare always seems to be heavy on offerings about relationship angst, but as it goes, *Fairytales* is OK to ride off into the sunset with.

-Bev Rudolfsen



**THINKING OUT OF THE BOX** Intriguing, enigmatic, exotic, dreamy theatre from Harrington and Kauffman in *The Show Formerly Known As*

## SHOW FORMERLY KNOWN AS, THE

★★★★

Richard Harrington and Chris Kauffman offer the sort of engaging inventiveness that one wants to see more of. Both performers seize the attention, but it's Kauffman who steals the show with his talent for mime, his plaintively hoarse voice and his delightfully expressive face. It has something to do with Walden Pond, the life of a mercenary and, well, Don Henley. It's rough, tender and terribly funny, and you can't take your eyes off it. I'm not entirely sure I know what this show is about, is about, but I wouldn't mind seeing it again all the same.

-Kevin Wilson

## SHOWDOWN AT THE OKIE DOKIE KARAOKE

★

Like dinner theatre without the dinner, *Showdown at the Okie Dokie Karaoke* will leave you feeling unsatisfied. When two sisters and their brother return to their hometown, Okie Dokie, Alberta, after their mother's death to claim their inheritance, they find that nothing has changed in the small town. Suffering from a tired premise, lukewarm performances, and amateurish technical difficulties (learn how to use a microphone before you put on a Fringe play, please), this play flops before intermission. Even the potentially hilarious final battle between Elvis impersonators comes off dull. At least the Cook County Saloon serves beer.

-Erika Thorkelson

## SLIP KNOT, THE

★★★★

*The Slip Knot* is a comic mono-

logue about a guy and his jobs in three different parts of his life. T.J. Dawe is an engaging storyteller, weaving together three stories about working at Shoppers Drug Mart in Toronto, for Canada Post, and as a taxi driver in Vancouver. He signals a change in timeline by stepping into one of three different coloured lights set up on the stage that looks like mic stands. It's a simple yet effective device, but the device is so clear that it's an enhancement rather than a necessity. Pardon the cliché, but you'll be transported for the hour and a half or so. Did I mention it was also really funny?

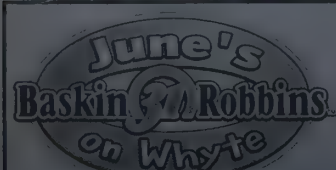
-Matt S.

## SLOWLY, AN EXCHANGE IS TAKING PLACE

★★★★

*Slowly* is a pastiche of images, text, and messages from the unconscious that surround the discovery of the body of a drowned woman (Tania Alvarado). Elaborately staged on a set that appears to be a reed filled marsh complemented by slide projections, this is an ambitious play that is much more than your typical Fringe fare. What begins as an investigation of a suspicious death becomes an investigation into the mind of Elizabeth (Shannon Larsen), a relatively ordinary young woman whose discovery triggers a sudden self-examination. The plot winds through dreams, a movie set directed by a man in a bear suit, a failing relationship and painful revelations. Complicated emotions are revealed through simple gestures. Beautiful.

-Mari Sasano



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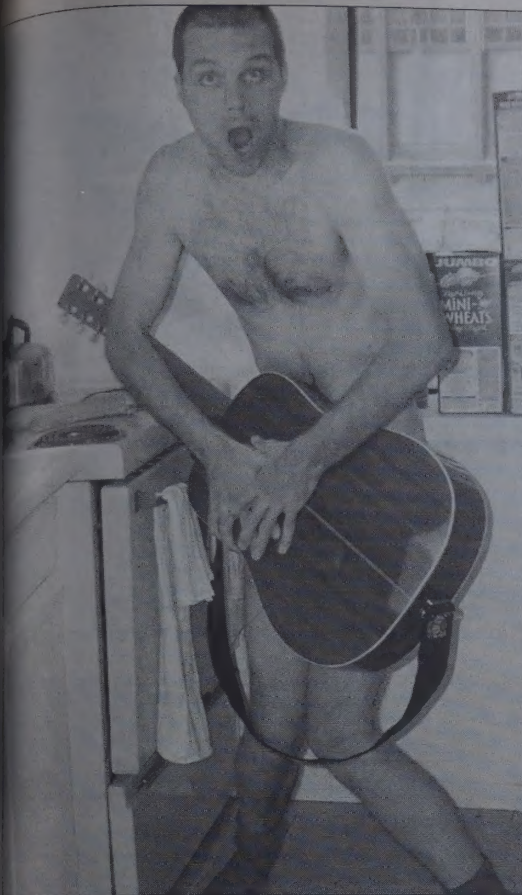
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theatrical tribute to the movies. Onstage, it translates into a bunch of mimey little bits invoking stuff like *Casablanca* or *Vertigo*. There's some fairly cool stagecraft, with four big shutters moving around mixing up the stage, with plenty of prop and costume gags. At the same time, though, after a while it starts to feel like a string of theatre exercises, like somebody said "Okay, do a 3-minute mime of the Godfather — Go!" and they just put all the results together into a show. The segments are well mimed, and it's fun and all to pick out the films, but there's no larger idea or point to it, so overall it's a pretty light hour.

—Stephen Notley

## SUCKING CHEST WOUND (AND OTHER LOVE SONGS)

Note to skinny young comedian from Toronto: Songs about kidnapped kids and their sliced-off ears are NOT funny, no matter how loudly your buddies in the front row guffaw. One-man shows are touchy, and if the humour is too skewed without a point, ya look like a jerk. Upstart Nathan Caswell has a few genuinely witty songs here and is saved only by his self-deprecating observations (poking fun at his hometown of Thunder Bay). The rest of the time, his material steps over the line of sardonic, hit-the-mark wit into something only 10-year-old boys would laugh at without feeling a little ashamed.

—Bev Rudolfsen

## TAINTED HEART TRILOGY

This bunch of kids from Grande Prairie mean well, but a guy in a pink pig costume just doesn't cut it. None of the stories in this collection goes beyond the basics of a high school drama class, and audiences can't be fooled into thinking otherwise. *Motherless Pig* sees a sow named Hortense off to the big city to make it as an actress, where she manages only to make it with a john. Bestiality and a fuzzy critter that looks like it belongs at KidsFringe... ough. The second



**DO I LOOK UNFULFILLED TO YOU?** Erin Geraghty combines loopy charm and wry humour in *Snapshots*.

piece in this puzzling show, *I Can Fly!* is slightly better, with a paralyzed kid telling her poignant story from a wheelchair. But the end result is awkward, lacking the depth and polish that Fringe-goers have come to expect for their 10 bucks.

—Bev Rudolfsen

## TERRIBLE BUT INCOMPLETE JOURNALS OF JOHN D., THE

Journals, especially writer's journals, fascinate me. Yet, while mined for biographies and fiction, it's not often you see the form on stage. Big-time reason to be curious to see what B.C.'s Beanboy Productions was going to do with this literary trope in *The Terrible but Incomplete Journals of John D.* This confident, minimally staged monologue set to live blues music, goes far to deconstruct the active thought process of a mind in turmoil, in this case a journalist's free-flowing meditations on life, love, loss and globalism. Full points for a text that encompassed both the personal and the political.

—Gilbert Bouchard

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Dave Pearce have found airtime on CBC radio and Fox TV. Richardson sounds uncannily like Nathan Lane, a nice little bonus. Give the pair a guitar and some tight pants, and their, uh, assets are limitless.

—Bev Rudolfsen

## SPICE

\*\*\* This is kind of a cute idea, a

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## SNAPSHOTS

\*\*\* Humanity's biggest fear isn't in dying, but in leaving nothing behind. Enter actor Erin Geraghty, on a poignant journey to find meaning to her single character's life, now threatened by illness. Using a tattered, ancient photo album, Geraghty beautifully superimposes her character's own quest on the life of Aunt Mo, her only living relative, now caught up in the cobwebs of senility. Caught between living her dream as an actress or choosing instead the necessity of radical surgery, the choice seems simple. Using a winning combination of loopy charm and wry humour, Geraghty sends a life-affirming, if bittersweet message.

—Bev Rudolfsen

## SPANDEX!

\*\*\* With the cry of 'Hot, hot, hot for your mom!', The Cowards kick into a collection of cheeky comedy sketches. This mischievous duo from Toronto sing, dance and jiggle their way through an hour's worth of sketches poking fun at everything from cheesy TV telethons to beer. The good-natured free-for-all includes two mackinaw-wearing goofs arguing about the difference between Lex Luthor and Martin Luther, an ode to Marny the Carny ("She may be missing fingers, but she smells like candy floss") and a cruise ship trip back to the days of heavy metal. It's no wonder Mark Richardson and



# FRINGEFESTIVAL

## THANDWENI: WHERE THE GHOSTS SCREAM

★★★★

Erik de Waal is a masterful storyteller who holds nothing back in his attack on the material he has written. His accent, which seemed like a mixture of Afrikaans and British private school, has the effect of sounding somewhat melodramatic to the Canadian ear. Although the production is interesting, the use of repetition and the narrative structure force comparison to Chris Dodd's *Silent Words*, which was a more compelling piece. Those not exposed to Dodd's work will likely have an easier time appreciating *Thandweni* than I did.

-Kurt Spenrath

## THIS IS WHAT I GET FOR LOVING AN ACTRESS

★★★★

I'm a big fan of sincerity in Fringe shows, and they seldom come more honest and straightforward than this one-man show by Gilbert DaSilva. Unencumbered by a set script, DaSilva tells the story of his quiet infatuation with a local actress, mostly detailing all the stages of self-delusion one goes through during a serious case of puppy love. It feels right, and while DaSilva's delivery lacked confidence at first, it seemed to build as he got wrapped up in his light-hearted confession. A simple story that just about everyone can relate to.

-Scott Sharplin

## THREE LOVELY GIRLS IN SPACE

Look for a review of this play in the Thursday's edition of *SEE Magazine*.

## TOM \* FOOLERY

★★★★

You can't go wrong with the works of Tom Lehrer. You can, however, go with differing degrees of right. Lehrer's clever rhymes and general lack of taste are magnificent in small doses; by the hour mark, it's all become a little formulaic. And the bits he didn't write himself, those that have been rewritten for Canuck or contemporary tastes tend to miss more often

than not. Still, the performances are solid, if not much more, and classics like *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park* or *The Elements* retain their full powers of guffaw induction, no matter what the circumstances.

-Adam Houston

## TROUT AND I'M HERBERT

★★★★★

Set in front of a simple backdrop of scattered trees, this pair of plays starring grumpy old men — and one grumpy old woman — high-light words, not actions. Insults and insight fly between old friends Bert and Charlie in *Trout*; *I'm Herbert* features Muriel and Herbert, an old couple with memory problems who reminisce about good times they may or may not have had together. Clever, thoughtful, and consistently funny, thanks to wonderfully nuanced performances by Fringe veterans Len Crowther, John Rivet, and Mary Glenfield, both plays keep the audience anticipating the next hilarious or poignant quip will come next.

-Erika Thorkelson

## TWO V'S IN A POD

★★★

"If you don't understand how a woman could both love her sister dearly, and want to wring her neck at the same time, then you're probably an only child." The love/hate sibling relationship is explored to death in this brief drama about two sisters locked in a storage room together following a robbery of the store they've just inherited. Velma and Victoria, though well-played, are character types, and the material they dredge up is familiar and often awkwardly revealed through confessions and monologues. Well-meaning, but I didn't buy it — but then, I'm an only child, so what do I know?

-Scott Sharplin

## UGLY ALBERTAN

★★★★

The *Ugly Albertan* hits way too close to home for all those of us raised in redneck rural Alberta who've ever cringed at an otherwise beloved relative spewing un-PC talk. The Alberta Beatnik (a local poet, songster and all-around hipster) also knows that feeling all



NO HOLDS BARRED South African Erik de Waal attacks his material in *Thandweni: Where the Ghosts Scream*.

too well and decided to immortalize this rural/urban tension in the form of a musical deconstructing his beloved Uncle Joe, a curmudgeon who makes Archie Bunker sound like Alice Walker. Really liked the music and Todd Kuziw's turn as Joe, but had some reservations about parts of the text. Needs some polishing.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## UNCANNED LAUGHTER

★

*Eight Channels and Nothing On* would be a more appropriate title for *Uncanned Laughter*. The play tries to simulate the experience of channel surfing through a series of eight vignettes, but is more like 45-minutes of dead air. The two-person skits include stuff like bungling criminal antics, customer service follies, and the trials of being an actor. Vaudevillian attempts at wacky accents and screwball banter lack rhythm and come off as flat as week-old pop. While the performances occasion-

ally warrant a chuckle, the actors can do little with such inane, clichéd dialogue. It's like watching real prime time TV, but you can't change channels.

-Dave Alexander

## UNSINKABLE

★★★★

The Bulgarian judge only gives this show three stars, but I give it four, just because this is probably the only play ever written about synchronized swimming. This is a "check your brain at the door and relax" comedy, competently executed by charming actors Lori Delorme and Michelle Winters. If you like synchronized swimming, it is your duty to see *Unsinkable*.

-Kurt Spenrath

## UTOPIA U.N. LIMITED

★★★1/2

A surprise! Although obviously an amateur production, with all the attendant pitfalls, this production's social satire is absolutely hilarious. Based on Gilbert and Sullivan's *Utopia, Limited*, first produced in 1893, the score and libretto are incredibly witty and totally appropriate to our political situation. King Ralph Paramount is very funny as played by Douglas Routledge who leads a cast blessed with strong voices. Hard to believe that in Alberta we could get such refreshing political comment. I'm going again — and paying!

-Irina Florian

## VELMA HUSSEY REVUE

★★★1/2

One of Theatre's frustrating conundrums is that while it takes no special talent to be a mediocre performer, it takes an exceptional talent to portray one. Jennine Profeta is a capable actress, but she needs to expand her range a little to do this story of a never-was performer justice. Velma has but two voices, one too shrill and mannered, which she relies on rather too heavily, and one perhaps a little too earnest, which makes selected moments maudlin rather than touching. And rimshots or no rimshots, the jokes just aren't that funny.

-Kevin Wilson

## VENUS RISING

★★★1/2

What do you get when you cross a human and a dog? You get *Venus Rising*, a story of science, faith, media and love gone bad. The production looks good, and a talented cast infuses the play with loopy, off-kilter frenzy. But the script takes aim at targets both predictable — we know that the media feeds callously on the sensational — and overstated: scientists, yet again, are portrayed as ignorant of their genuine impact, blinded by their hunger for achievement. The sense of dissatisfaction you feel is the inevitable result of crossing farce with straw men.

-Kevin Wilson

## VENUS, A VAMP AND A VIRGIN, A

★★★★

Call it Ford-Minivan-verité theatre: *A Venus, A Vamp and A Virgin* is a rollicking revue/musical about the joys and heartbreaks of stay-at-home moms. Yes, I did say musical — a traditional, old-school Broadway one to boot. (Imagine Rodgers and Hammerstein teaming up with Erma Bombeck and writing a song about lost socks.) Performances by Susan Daniel, Elaine Dunbar and Dawn Sadoway were flawless and the height of craft — as was the music and choreography. My only complaint (and a small one) is that they didn't integrate the piece's spoken word bits as well as they could have.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## VIOLENT VINE, THE

★★★★

As penance for foisting a display this disturbing on an unsuspecting public, Ron Pearson should be beaten like a Whyte Avenue jay-walker. This deviant bastard has crossed the line with his latest freak show, and once I clean the tears and vomit from my clothing, I will notify the appropriate authorities. Definitely worth one dollar.

-Kurt Spenrath

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# FRINGEFESTIVAL

## WEAVERVILLE WALTZ

★★★★★  
The Fringe is at its best when it's a mix of simple. What do you need beyond talented performers and strong, bewitched texts? Case in point, Andy Rutherford's sublime *Weaverille Waltz*. Spanning its protagonist's life from the late '50s to the present, this work is a straight-ahead, visceral tale-spinning, mainly chronicling the poignant highlights of a more-type-than-I-am-not, albeit harsh, trailer-park up-bringing. Rutherford's command of the language and a warm, super-engaging presentation makes for a mesmerizing production. The work is the definition of honest, trusting its material and endlessly accurate in its sense of the human condition without succumbing to bitterness or the melodrama.

-Gilbert Bouchard

## WIDE OPEN BEAVER

★★★★★  
This play's name makes it sound like it could be a miserable experience, a gross pile of icky, self-important Canadian cunt humor. But no, it's history that makes *Wide Open Beaver* go round as one-woman-shower Debbie

Patterson describes some notable women from Canada's past, including a giant-girl from Nova Scotia. The history is interspersed between little "wilderness of Canada" slide segments full of single entendres about "the dense bush of the Canadian fields." Patterson's easygoing style and stage presence wins the crowd over; you can see her almost giggling in pleasure at each historical detail.

-Stephen Notley

## WILD ROSE AND ME

★★★★★  
Held over from the Winnipeg Fringe Festival, *Wild Rose and Me* is the sweet and strange story of the how the hyper-kinetic Wild Rose and the stone-faced Fletcher (both played hilariously by Krista Morrison) meet at the Niagara Falls 35th Annual Tap Competition and change each other's lives forever. Spurred on by a soundtrack that is a crazy mix of Willie Nelson and early '90s dance, Morrison flies at breakneck speeds between character. Unfortunately, the actor seems to get tired near the end, just as Wild Rose gives her explosive final performance at the competi-



**I WANNA KNOW WHAT LOVE IS** Sometimes the sap runs a little thick in the generally inventive *Würm*, a fairy tale set in land where the love isn't.

tion, causing the one-woman play to lose its all-important momentum.

-Erika Thorkelson

## WONDERFUL LIFE

★★★★★  
Fringe favourites One World Theatre from Seattle once again deliver with *Wonderful Life*, a multimedia po-mo riff on Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. Lawrence and Jake are angels who must atone for their earthly mistakes by helping those still alive avert their own problems. Their project? Henry, Jane and Martin Bardo, a family who has never recovered from the tragic death of their mother. The video projections are totally non-gratuitous and augment the already absorbing storytelling. Spotless!

-Mari Sasano

## WOOOOO

★★★  
The premise has more than a ghost of a chance: a seminar in how to succeed in the afterlife.

You'd think that the material amuses moderately and intermittently: it might have amused more thoroughly and consistently with another performer. Nicole Barnett is earnest as the guide from the hereafter, but too often she tries to force the comedy. As her character points out, the key to scaring people is to remember that Less is More. The same applies to comedy.

-Kevin Wilson

## WRECK

★★★★★  
Taken from the true story of a London train wreck in 1999, the story takes place in a doomed subway car where five characters reveal snippets of their lives while they wait to be rescued. The story moves back and forth in time without losing the audience. The scenes in the present — where rescuers struggle to find survivors in the dark — get the adrenaline pumping, while the past — the character's life stories — are engaging the emotions. The cast is

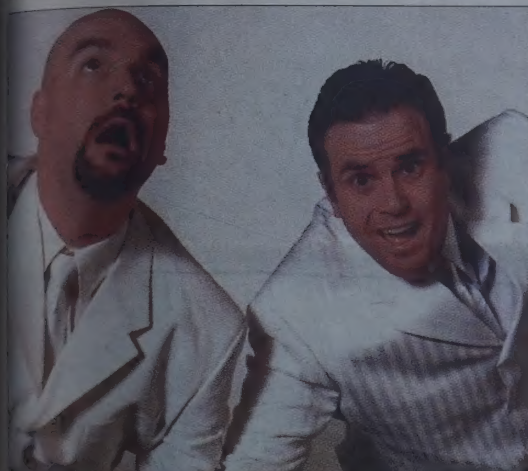
strong; Tara Beagan, in particular, is hilarious as Jessica, a lonely teenager studying hair design. Unfortunately the play ends as abruptly as the pre-empted rail journey.

-Jacqueline Janelle

## WÜRM

★★★★★  
A musical fairy tale about love in a place where love has been banished for 5,000 years. Never mind that they haven't a clue what love is — it's been banished — this boy *würm* and this girl *würm* are determined that in love is what they want to be. It's a testament to the power of Love, see? This troupe has a couple of genuinely talented performers, physical and comic, able to switch characters at the turn of a *würm*, and they muster a couple of pretty funny bits. But then Love comes to town and the sap begins to run. And then they start to sing. You need to know that *würm* ears are not like ours.

-Kevin Wilson



**TOUCHED BY ANGELS** Lawrence and Jake are on a heavenly mission in One World Theatre's *Wonderful Life*.

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## TOP TO BOTTOM

A listing of Fringe plays in order of their critical ranking (out of five stars)

★★★★★

Be A Man  
Bone Songs  
Condom, the Cucumber, and the Girl from Ipanema, The  
Fanny Hill  
It's Me Only Better  
Metropolis Noir  
Molly  
Moving Along  
Return to Sender  
See Me Naked  
Trout and I'm Herbert  
Weaverville Waltz  
Wonderful Life

★★★★★ 1/2

Betrayal  
Earthly Delights  
Fitch and Cabbage  
Flight  
Roommates 2.0

★★★★★

Big Thought of Mr. Fitzsimmons, The  
Black and White Pictures  
Brilliant Traces  
Capacity to Enter  
Citizen Plate  
Dear Liar!  
Desdemona  
Don't Look So Worried  
Edmonton Queen, The  
Everything You Ever Wanted to Know...  
Firebird, The  
Fool's Gold  
Ghost Trains  
Giraffe and a Half and other Tall Tales  
Hammer of Witches  
Lig and Bittle  
Louis Schism: Mindreader  
Lover, The  
Mists of Time  
Night without Stars  
Nunsense  
Old Curiosity Shop, The  
Possible Maps  
Pres. Matwychuck  
Pure Hoopal  
Road Pig  
Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll  
Show Formerly Known As, The  
Slip Knot, The  
Slowly, an exchange is taking place  
Unsinkable  
Violent Vine, The  
Wild Rose and Me  
Wreck

★★★★★ 1/2

Barefoot  
Clutch, The  
Cocktails at Pam's  
Die-Nasty  
Good Girls Gone Bad x 3  
Gordon's Big Bald Head  
Ladies of the Loo  
Marie Christine  
Second Shepherd's Play, The  
Utopia U.N. Limited  
Venus Rising

★★★★★

Aunt Agatha's Storytime  
Bacchae, The  
Between Yourself and Me  
Bob Edwards: The Eye Opener  
Brief Lives

Chicken Man  
Closer  
Conan... and the Librarians  
Coop Dreams  
Crumbs  
Das Barbecü  
Deadrats on Arrival  
Domino Courts  
Final Broadcast, The  
Human Nature, A  
Interview, The  
Kids on the Fringe  
Kimono Loosened, The  
Life After God  
Men Commandments, The  
Place Your Commercial Here — Drag show!  
Running  
Screwballs  
Seascape with Sharks and Dancer  
Seeds  
Sex, Lies and Fairytales  
Snapshots  
Spandex!  
Splice  
Terrible but Incomplete Journals of John D., The  
Thandweni: Where the Ghosts Scream  
This is What I Get for Loving an Actress  
Tom\* Foolery  
Ugly Albertan  
Venus, A Vamp and A Virgin, A  
Wide Open Beaver  
Würn

★★★ 1/2

Blackpool and Parrish  
Complete History of Canada  
Fair Play Rulz  
Hollow Ground  
Velma Hussey Revue

★★★

Bait, The Switch and the Madman's Scratch, The  
Beginnings in Free Verse  
Compleat Wks of Willm Shkspr (Abridged), The  
David Betterman Show, The  
Dead Box, The  
Eighties Ladies  
Hands  
Hangliding Over the Abyss  
Hotbox  
Mamagorka  
Moosetrap, The  
Notre Dame of Paris — The Musical  
Overcoat, The  
Passion: A Play In One Act  
Pyropornomania  
Sanctuary  
Sucking Chest Wound (and other love songs)  
Two V'S in a Pod  
Wooooo

★

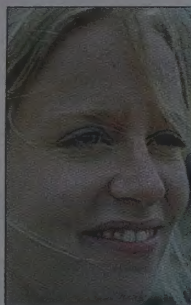
Code Red  
Don't Take No For an Answer, Unless It's On a Pregnancy Test  
I Want to Fly  
In Search of the Perfect Song  
Oasis  
Quiet Room  
Real Millennium Wireless Broadcast  
Showdown at the Okie Dokie Karaoke  
Tainted Heart Trilogy  
Uncanned Laughter

No Stars

Pigs  
Progress and Antiprogess on Plato's TV

# Fringe patrons speak!

Everyone has an opinion — and Fringe lovers are ready to share theirs. We asked the faithful to recommend and rate their favourite show so far.



Edmonton Queen

★★★★★

"Quite beautiful"

Jennie Esdale



Seascape with Sharks

★★★ 1/2

"Character reminded me of myself"

Tia Sloan



Old Curiosity Shop

★★★★★

"Brilliant energy"

Flora Cain



See Me Naked

★★★★★

"Thought-provoking"

Dwayne Bablak



Flight

★★★★★

"A really interesting story"

Kevin Sutley  
Director, Desdemona



Nunsense

★★★★★

"A fun musical"

Barb Mah



Between Yourself and Me

★★★★★

"Ensemble cast is really great"

Richard Selfridge



Dear Liar

★★★★★

"Good interaction"

Regina Starkey

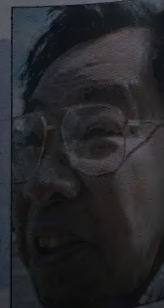


President Matwychuk

★★★★★

"Launches himself into the elite in Canada"

Trevor Anderson  
Director, Sex, Lies and Fairy Tales



Between Yourself and Me

★★★★★

Comes from Vancouver just for the Fringe

Larry Wong